



## Meadowlark Extension District Weekly Agent News Articles

### Fenceline

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#### To Dart or Not to Dart

A few years ago, I was involved in the interview process for hiring a new staff member in the Animal Science department. Somehow, the conversation was turned to medicating cattle with dart guns. There seems to be quite a bit of controversy over this use. Those of us, in this room, were quite divided on the practice.

I understand it might seem a bit reckless or lazy. One of my coworkers, thought they should be completely banned. He saw no need for them at all. I used the real life example we were faced with, a cow with a bad case of foot rot. She was secluding herself to the most woody slopes of the pasture, near the creek. In order to treat her, we would have to push her back to the catch pen, about ¼ mile away. She was limping very badly. So we did what we had to do, we borrowed a dart gun and treated her. A week later, she was feeling better, we were able to get her to the catch pen and bring her on home where we could watch her and treat whenever necessary.

Now my friend, I use the term loosely, told me we should have just backed up the truck and trailer to her, loaded her and take her home. I told him, he doesn't understand the pastures of eastern Kansas with deep slopes, ditches, trees and what not. I still think I should take him on a road trip, to broaden his horizons. I understand where he lives a hill and a grove of trees are hard to come by.

The use of pneumatic dart guns or remote drug delivery systems for medicating animals is on the increase. Sometimes it's out of necessity, other times it's for convenience. The Beef Quality Assurance crew worry about drug residues, and increasing injection site injuries.

It's important for us to use these technologies, according to label directions. Use only the amount of medicine indicated, only use the darts in the neck muscle, in the small triangle that BQA suggests.

Make sure that all of the needle is recovered, and nothing broke off in the muscle. Make sure that the drug is delivered according to label directions, intra-muscular or subcutaneous. Of course, make sure that treatment follows the label guidelines.

There are reports of darts and their parts ending up in beef carcasses at packing plants. This is an issue that will haunt all of us, if this continues.

This controversy is not going away, and neither are the dart guns. I realize this is not the ideal way to treat a sick animal, but as animal caretakers, sometimes we have to do whatever we can, to make that animal feel better.

As the University researchers study the efficacy of the dart guns, hopefully they will engineer a more accurate delivery than the darts are doing now.